ONLY 2.5 OF 10?

Marriage, Bureaucracy, and the Lifelong Covenant Measure

A research-ready analysis of the 7.5-out-of-10 model, the conversion from people to marriage units, and the historical shift from customary capacity to statutory recognition

CENTRAL CONCLUSION

Under the precise model used in this paper, 2.5 out of 10 adult person-equivalents satisfy the strict standard of one first-and-only marriage preserved until death, while 7.5 out of 10 do not. Because two persons constitute one marriage, this equals 1.25 successful lifelong-marriage units out of five potential couple-units. Scaled to ten potential marriage units, the result is 2.5 successful and 7.5 unsuccessful. This is a whole-population covenant measure, not the conventional success rate among marriages that actually occurred.

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Important classification: defined analytic model, not an official global statistic

Abstract

This paper reconstructs a strict measure of marriage success from the entire argument developed in the source thread. The measure does not ask merely who is presently married or what percentage of filed marriages have ended in divorce. It asks a narrower covenantal question: how many people enter one first marriage, remain with that same spouse without divorce or replacement, and complete the union only through death? Under this definition, widowhood is completion; divorce is failure of the first marriage; remarriage cannot retroactively restore the first marriage; and lifelong never-marriage is counted as nonachievement because the lifelong marital bond was never entered.

Using the thread's rounded ten-adult model - four lifelong never-married adults, one adult already divorced, five adults presently married, and a forecast that half of those five presently married adults will not remain in their first marriage until death - the result is 2.5 successful adult person-equivalents and 7.5 unsuccessful person-equivalents. Since each person represents one side, or 0.5, of a two-person marriage, the same result is 1.25 successful marriage-equivalent units out of five possible units. Scaled to ten potential marriage units, that is 2.5 successful and 7.5 unsuccessful.

The paper then places that model beside verified historical and demographic evidence. English common law recognized marriage-related ages of fourteen for males and twelve for females, but Blackstone also documented extensive legal formalities, demonstrating that the past was not literally free of law or bureaucracy. A 1929 British statute later made marriages involving anyone under sixteen void. A documented Virginia Indian example linked eligibility to puberty and initiation rather than a universal birthday, while also showing why no single rule should be generalized across all Indigenous nations. Modern U.S. data show later first marriages and fewer married-couple households, but those data do not prove that age bureaucracy alone caused the shift. The final thesis is therefore conditional and carefully bounded: bureaucracy can define legal capacity, control recognition, alter statistical categories, and help turn a statutory line into a social taboo; however, the 2.5-of-10 result remains a transparent model rather than a measured worldwide rate.

Document Map

- The exact question and definition of success
- The 7.5-out-of-10 calculation
- The conversion from persons to marriage units
- Why remarriage remains a failed first marriage under the chosen standard
- The crucial difference between a population measure and a rate among actual marriages
- The historical shift from common-law/customary capacity to statutory age floors
- How bureaucracy can become social taboo
- Modern demographic evidence and limitations
- A final conclusion ready for quotation or further synthesis in NotebookLM

1. The Exact Question Being Answered

The ordinary divorce rate is not the question. A current-status survey is not the question either. The question developed in the thread is broader and stricter: out of the whole adult population, how many achieve one first-and-only marriage that remains intact until death?

That question changes the denominator. Standard demographic tables separate people into categories such as never married, currently married, separated, divorced, widowed, and remarried. The chosen covenant measure reorganizes those categories by final outcome. It asks whether the same first marital union reached its natural completion without divorce or replacement.

1.1 Definition of success

SUCCESS

One first marriage + the same spouse + no divorce + no replacement marriage + completion only by the death of one spouse.

1.2 What counts as nonachievement or failure under this standard

- Lifelong never-marriage: the bond was never entered.
- Divorce: the first bond was entered but did not endure.
- Separation that permanently ends the union: the bond did not endure in substance, even if paperwork lags.
- Remarriage after divorce: a later union may endure, but it cannot erase the failure of the first marriage.
- Serial relationships or cohabitation without a lifelong marriage: the defined marital outcome was not achieved.

This classification is about the outcome being measured, not the worth of a person. It does not claim that an unmarried, divorced, or remarried person is worth less. It says only that the defined outcome - one first marriage preserved until death - was not achieved.

1.3 Widowhood

Widowhood counts as success because death completed rather than dissolved the marriage. A widow or widower may later remarry and still have completed the first marriage until death. If the standard is made even stricter - one spouse for the entire lifetime with no later marriage after widowhood - that would be a different metric and must be stated separately. The present paper counts a first marriage completed by death as successful.

2. The Ten-Adult Model

The source thread uses a rounded illustrative population of ten adults. It is not presented here as an exact global census. It is a model designed to make the moral and mathematical distinction visible.

Population category	Persons out of 10	Treatment under the model	Successful person-equivalents	Unsuccessful person-equivalents
Lifelong never married	4.0	No lifelong marriage entered	0.0	4.0
Already divorced	1.0	First marriage already failed	0.0	1.0
Currently married, later fails	2.5	Half of the five currently married	0.0	2.5
Currently married, endures to death	2.5	Half of the five currently married	2.5	0.0
TOTAL	**10.0**		**2.5**	**7.5**

Table 1. The thread's defined ten-adult model.

2.1 Direct calculation in person-equivalents

Unsuccessful = Never married + Already divorced + Projected later failures

Unsuccessful = 4 + 1 + (0.50 x 5) = 7.5

Successful = (1 - 0.50) x 5 = 2.5

Result = 2.5 successful / 7.5 unsuccessful = 25% / 75%

THE NUMERIC ANSWER

Under the stated assumptions, 2.5 out of 10 adult person-equivalents achieve one first-and-only marriage until death. The other 7.5 out of 10 do not.

2.2 The assumption that produces 7.5 rather than 7.0

The 7.5 result applies the fifty-percent forecast to the five people who are still married, after separately counting the one person who is already divorced. In symbols, the model is one known failure plus 50% of the five unresolved current marriages.

If the phrase "half of marriages fail" were instead applied to all six ever-married people - the one divorced plus the five currently married - then three of the six would fail and three would succeed. Added to four lifelong never-married people, that alternative model would produce 7.0 unsuccessful and 3.0 successful out of ten. Therefore, the paper does not hide the premise: 7.5 requires one already-observed failure plus an additional 50% projected failure among the five currently married.

3. Why One Person Equals 0.5 of a Marriage Unit

A marriage is one union made by two persons. When a population is expressed in people but the result is translated into marriage units, each person represents one side of the union. Each person is therefore 0.5 of a marriage-equivalent unit for bookkeeping purposes. This does not make anyone half a person; it converts a person-based denominator into a two-person union denominator.

10 persons / 2 persons per marriage = 5 potential marriage-equivalent units

2.5 successful persons / 2 = 1.25 successful marriage-equivalent units

7.5 unsuccessful persons / 2 = 3.75 unsuccessful marriage-equivalent units

Scale	Potential marriage units	Successful units	Unsuccessful units	Success share	Unsuccessful share
Original ten-adult scale	5.00	1.25	3.75	25%	75%
Scaled to ten potential marriage units	10.00	2.50	7.50	25%	75%

Table 2. Conversion from adult person-equivalents to potential marriage-equivalent units.

3.1 The exact conclusion when the question says "out of ten marriages"

REQUIRED DENOMINATOR DISTINCTION

If "ten marriages" means ten marriages that actually occurred, then a 50% survival premise yields five successful marriages out of ten. If "ten marriages" means ten potential lifelong marriage units in the

whole population - so lifelong never-marriage remains in the equation - the model yields 2.5 successful units out of ten. The intended argument is the second measure.

Accordingly, the most accurate headline is not simply "only 2.5 of ten marriages succeed," because readers may assume the denominator contains ten filed marriages. The precise headline is: "Under the whole-population lifelong-covenant measure, only 2.5 of ten potential marriage units are realized and preserved until death."

4. Why Remarriage Does Not Reverse the First Result

The chosen measure follows the continuity of the first union. Once that first marriage ends through divorce, the first-marriage outcome is fixed as unsuccessful. A second marriage may be stable, loving, and lifelong; it may therefore count as a successful second marriage under a different analysis. It cannot, however, change the historical fact that the first marriage did not last until death.

The 0.5 accounting follows the same logic. One divorced person is one side of a failed marriage and therefore contributes 0.5 of a failed marriage-equivalent share. In a complete population containing both former spouses, the two 0.5 shares combine into one failed marriage-equivalent unit. In a sample where the former spouse is outside the sample, 0.5 remains the person-side share. This is why the model should be described as a normalized person-equivalent analysis rather than a count of unique marriage licenses.

5. Current Status Is Not a Completed Lifetime Outcome

A person who is married today has not yet completed the test. The marriage may end through death, which satisfies the standard, or through divorce, which does not. Likewise, a young adult classified as never married today may marry later. A present-status table therefore cannot by itself establish a lifelong success rate.

The U.S. National Center for Health Statistics reported that, among women ages 15 to 44 in its 2011-2015 analysis, the probability of first-marriage disruption was 22% by five years, 36% by ten years, 45% by fifteen years, and 53% by twenty years. The agency defines disruption as separation, divorce, or death, noting that death was rare for that age range. These figures make a near-fifty-percent modeling premise understandable, but they do not establish a universal lifetime rate for all sexes, ages, eras, or countries. [3]

The CDC also reports annual marriage and divorce rates, such as a 2023 provisional U.S. divorce rate of 2.4 per 1,000 population. That annual crude rate answers a different question from the lifetime probability that a first marriage will end. Annual events, current status, cohort survival, and the moral covenant measure must not be interchanged. [4]

6. Historical Legal Capacity Before the Modern Statutory Floor

The historical part of the argument is that modern law did more than record an unchanging social taboo. Law progressively defined marriageable capacity through formal age thresholds, prescribed ceremonies, licenses, records, parental consent rules, and judicial or governmental recognition. Once legal recognition was denied below a fixed age, the statutory boundary could become the dominant cultural boundary as well.

6.1 English common law: twelve and fourteen

William Blackstone described the old English legal disability of age in marriage. A marriage involving a boy under fourteen or a girl under twelve was "inchoate and imperfect" and could be rejected when either party reached the stated age of consent. He also recorded that canon law sometimes looked to physical constitution or capacity rather than age alone. [5]

Blackstone further stated that, under common law, once the parties themselves had reached the age of consent, no additional concurrence was required to make the marriage valid. That rule was later overlaid by statutes involving banns, licenses, parental or guardian consent, penalties for clergy, specified locations, and prescribed forms. [5]

6.2 The past was not literally free of bureaucracy

It would be historically inaccurate to say there was "zero state involvement" throughout the past. Blackstone's own account shows that eighteenth-century English marriage already operated within layers of common law, canon law, statutes, parish requirements, banns, licenses, parental rules, clergy rules, and courts. The defensible claim is comparative: older frameworks allowed different forms of local, familial, ecclesiastical, customary, or capacity-based recognition, while later systems increasingly standardized recognition through categorical statutory floors and centralized records.

Blackstone also recorded an argument against legal restraints on marriage: he wrote that such restraints could hinder population increase and encourage sexual conduct among the unmarried. This does not prove that every modern age law causes nonmarriage, but it shows that the concern about restricting the marital gateway existed inside the historical legal debate itself. [5]

6.3 The 1929 statutory shift

The British Age of Marriage Act 1929 declared a marriage void when either person was under sixteen. The long title expressly described the Act as one "to make void marriages between persons either of whom is under the age of sixteen." This is a clear example of the transition from an older voidable, capacity-related framework to an absolute statutory floor. [6]

6.4 Indigenous customary diversity and readiness

No single rule can honestly be called "Native law" for all Indigenous nations. Marriage customs differed across nations, kinship systems, regions, and historical periods. A documented example from early Virginia Indian society reports that women became eligible for marriage at puberty, while men became eligible after completing the huskanaw initiation into manhood and demonstrating readiness to hunt, fish, and fight. [7]

The importance of this example is not that every Indigenous nation used the same age or ceremony. It demonstrates the larger contrast between a readiness-based customary framework and a universal chronological birthday fixed by an external statute. It also shows why broad claims must preserve tribal specificity rather than collapsing many sovereign peoples into one practice.

7. How Bureaucracy Can Become the Taboo

The core thesis can be expressed as a sequence rather than as a slogan. Bureaucracy first defines legal capacity. It then controls the official recognition of the union. The official category determines what appears in records and statistics. Repeated legal classification then teaches society which relationships may be called marriage and which must be described as something else. Over time, the legal boundary can become a moral and cultural taboo even when the original historical frameworks were more varied.

Stage	Effect
1. Capacity	The law fixes a chronological age and treats those below it as legally unable to marry.
2. Recognition	Licenses, records, approved officiants, parental consent, or judicial approval determine whether the union exists in law.
3. Classification	Unrecognized unions disappear from the official marriage category and are counted as never married, cohabiting, or unlawful.
4. Cultural feedback	The statutory boundary becomes a social taboo, and the taboo reinforces the legal structure.

Table 3. The proposed law-to-taboo feedback mechanism.

This mechanism can alter marriage statistics even without changing human biology. If legal recognition is postponed, people remain in the never-married category longer. Some eventually marry; some form relationships outside marriage; some never marry. Therefore, a statutory gateway can influence the timing and classification of marriage. Demonstrating how much it caused the total modern decline, however, would require historical causal analysis beyond the arithmetic model.

8. Modern Demographic Context

Modern U.S. data confirm a major shift toward later marriage and fewer married-couple households. The Census Bureau reported that married-couple households constituted 47% of U.S. households in 2025, down from 66% in 1975. One-person households accounted for 29% in 2025, up from 20% in 1975. The estimated median age at first marriage was 30.8 for men and 28.4 for women in 2025, compared with 23.5 and 21.1 in 1975. [1]

Historical Census Table MS-2 reports an estimated median first-marriage age of 26.1 for men and 22.0 for women in the 1890 Census. Compared with 2025, that is an increase of 4.7 years for men and 6.4 years for women. The low common-law age of legal capacity therefore must not be mistaken for the ordinary age at which most people married. A legal minimum and a population median describe different things. [2]

Year	Men: median age at first marriage	Women: median age at first marriage	Source context
1890	26.1	22.0	Historical Census estimate
1975	23.5	21.1	Census comparison year
2025	30.8	28.4	Current Census estimate used here

Table 4. Selected U.S. median-age-at-first-marriage benchmarks. [1][2]

These trends are consistent with the claim that the institutional timing of marriage has changed drastically. They do not establish a single cause. Economic conditions, education, employment, housing, contraception, cultural individualism, cohabitation, changing gender roles, and changing expectations of marriage may also contribute. The bureaucracy thesis is strongest when presented as a mechanism and a major structural influence, not as a statistically isolated sole cause without further evidence.

9. What the 2.5-of-10 Model Proves - and What It Does Not

9.1 What it proves mathematically

- Given four lifelong never-married adults, one already-divorced adult, and five currently married adults, with half of the five later failing, the result is exactly 2.5 successful and 7.5 unsuccessful person-equivalents.
- Dividing by two converts the person counts into 1.25 successful and 3.75 unsuccessful marriage-equivalent units out of five potential units.
- Scaling the same 25%/75% proportions to ten potential marriage units yields 2.5 successful and 7.5 unsuccessful units.
- Remarriage cannot restore the first marriage under a first-marriage-until-death definition.

9.2 What it does not prove empirically

- It does not prove that 75% is the measured global rate.
- It does not show that every currently never-married person will remain unmarried for life.
- It does not show that exactly half of every current-marriage cohort will later divorce.
- It does not prove that statutory age rules alone caused modern singlehood or divorce.
- It does not count unique marriage certificates; it measures person-side marriage-equivalent shares.

9.3 Sensitivity to the projected failure rate among the five currently married

Projected failure among five currently married	Successful person-equivalents	Unsuccessful person-equivalents
40%	3.0	7.0
50%	2.5	7.5
53%	2.35	7.65
60%	2.0	8.0

Table 5. The model is conditional: changing the forecast changes the result. The 53% row is included only as a comparison with the CDC's 20-year disruption estimate for women ages 15-44 in 2011-2015; it is not a universal lifetime rate. [3]

10. Integrated Conclusion

The entire argument rests on separating three things that are often confused: legal recognition, demographic status, and covenantal completion. Government statistics usually ask whether a person is currently married, never married, divorced, separated, or widowed. The strict measure developed here asks a different question: did the person establish one first marriage and preserve that same union until death? Once that standard is chosen, never-marriage and divorce remain different events, but both fall on the same side of the final outcome because neither produces one uninterrupted first marriage completed by death.

The rounded ten-adult model then becomes straightforward. Four never marry, one is already divorced, and five are currently married. If half of those five current marriages ultimately fail, 2.5 of the five succeed and 2.5 fail. The final person-equivalent result is therefore 2.5 successful and 7.5 unsuccessful out of ten. Because every marriage contains two people, the ten adults represent five potential marriage units: 1.25 succeed and 3.75 do not. When scaled to ten potential marriage units, the answer remains 2.5 successful and 7.5 unsuccessful.

The historical argument explains why the denominator itself may have changed. Older legal and customary systems did not all use the same modern chronological boundary. Blackstone documented the common-law ages of fourteen for males and twelve for females, while also showing that legal forms and parental rules already existed. A documented Virginia Indian system connected eligibility with puberty and initiation. The 1929 British statute then illustrates the movement toward an absolute statutory floor. The past was therefore not lawless, but authority and capacity were organized differently and with greater variation.

Modern bureaucracy can turn its own classification into social reality. It establishes the age of capacity, decides what receives a license and record, excludes other unions from the category of marriage, and supplies the categories used in official statistics. Culture then learns the statutory line as taboo. At the same time, modern society increasingly tolerates postponed marriage, lifelong singlehood, cohabitation, divorce, and replacement unions. The gateway into marriage becomes more tightly regulated while the expectation that one marriage must endure becomes less absolute.

The final conclusion must therefore be stated with precision: under the whole-population, first-and-only-marriage-until-death model developed in this thread, only 2.5 out of ten potential lifelong marriage units are successfully realized and preserved, while 7.5 out of ten are not. Among ten marriages that actually occurred, a separate 50% survival assumption would yield five successful marriages; that is not the denominator used by the larger civilizational argument. The 2.5 figure is a conditional moral-demographic model, not an official global statistic, but its arithmetic is internally coherent once the denominator and assumptions are expressly named.

FINAL QUOTABLE FORM

When success means one first-and-only marriage preserved with the same spouse until death, the whole-population model yields 2.5 successful lifelong-marriage equivalents out of ten potential unions and 7.5 that never form or do not endure. The figure is conditional rather than an official global rate, but the arithmetic is exact under the stated assumptions.

Appendix A. Compact Formula

Let:

- N = number who remain never married for life
- D = number already known to have a failed first marriage
- M = number currently married whose final outcome is unresolved
- p = projected fraction of M who will not remain in the first marriage until death

$$\text{Failure} = N + D + (p \times M)$$

$$\text{Success} = (1 - p) \times M$$

For N = 4, D = 1, M = 5, p = 0.50:

$$\text{Failure} = 4 + 1 + 2.5 = 7.5$$

$$\text{Success} = 2.5$$

$$\text{Marriage-equivalent units} = \text{person-equivalents} / 2$$

Appendix B. Suggested NotebookLM Queries

- Explain the difference between the 2.5-of-10 population result and the 5-of-10 result among marriages that actually occurred.
- Recalculate the model if 40%, 45%, 50%, 53%, or 60% of the five currently married adults later fail to remain in their first marriage until death.
- Identify every statement in the paper that is a verified historical fact, a demographic fact, a moral definition, a mathematical assumption, or a causal inference.
- Trace the historical movement from common-law or readiness-based capacity to absolute statutory age floors.
- Analyze the proposed feedback loop by which a legal age boundary becomes a cultural taboo.
- Construct the strongest criticism of the bureaucracy thesis and then the strongest evidence-based defense.
- Rewrite the integrated conclusion as a 2,200-character public essay while preserving all denominator distinctions.

Sources and Research Notes

The sources below ground the historical and demographic claims. The 2.5/7.5 result itself is derived from the expressly stated model, not taken from any source as an official statistic.

[1] U.S. Census Bureau. "Census Bureau Releases New Estimates on America's Families and Living Arrangements." December 2, 2025. Reports that married-couple households were 47% of U.S. households in 2025 versus 66% in 1975, one-person households were 29% versus 20%, and estimated median first-marriage ages were 30.8 for men and 28.4 for women. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2025/families-and-living-arrangements.html

[2] U.S. Census Bureau. "Historical Marital Status Tables," Table MS-2, Estimated Median Age at First Marriage, 1890 to Present. The 1890 Census row reports 26.1 for men and 22.0 for women; the December 2025 table reports 30.8 and 28.4 for 2025. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html

[3] National Center for Health Statistics. "Key Statistics from the National Survey of Family Growth - Divorce and Marital Disruption." The 2011-2015 tabulation reports first-marriage disruption probabilities of 22% by five years, 36% by ten, 45% by fifteen, and 53% by twenty among women ages 15-44; disruption includes separation, divorce, or death, with death rare for the age range. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/key_statistics/d.htm

[4] National Center for Health Statistics. "Marriage and Divorce - FastStats." Reports 2023 provisional U.S. marriage and divorce event counts and crude rates, including a divorce rate of 2.4 per 1,000 population for 45 reporting states and the District of Columbia. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm

[5] William Blackstone. Commentaries on the Laws of England, Book I, Chapter 15, "Of Husband and Wife," hosted by Yale Law School's Avalon Project. Relevant passages discuss under-fourteen males and under-twelve females, common-law consent, later statutory parental rules, banns, licenses, and arguments concerning restraints on marriage. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/blackstone_bk1ch15.asp

[6] Parliament of the United Kingdom. Age of Marriage Act 1929, 19 & 20 Geo. 5 c. 36. The Act made void marriages involving a person under sixteen. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/19-20/36/enacted

[7] Encyclopedia Virginia. "Marriage in Early Virginia Indian Society." Reports that women became eligible for marriage at puberty and men after the huskanaw initiation into manhood, while describing the society-specific obligations connected with readiness. https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/marriage-in-early-virginia-indian-society/

[8] National Park Service. "Pocahontas: Her Life and Legend." Describes a Virginia Indian coming-of-age ceremony associated with eligibility for courtship and marriage, while serving as a supplementary example rather than a universal Indigenous rule. https://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/pocahontas-her-life-and-legend.htm

Use note: For public presentation, retain the phrase "under this defined model" or "under the whole-population covenant measure." Removing that qualifier would turn a transparent calculation into an unsupported claim of an official global rate.